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Remarks

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The National Cancer Institute is one of the Institutes of the National Institutes of Health and within it there is a division of prevention and much of the anti-smoking activity that takes place at the National Institutes of Health, takes place in that subdivision.

This was a training session for the field directors in the COMMIT program. COMMIT stands for Community Intervention Trial for Smoking Cessation.

This set of remarks is included in this archive as part of the anti-smoking endeavor and to show once again that the Surgeon General, if he chooses to, can be an integral part of a number of things that are going on in the agencies of the Public Health Service which I believed did a lot to strengthen the bond between agencies, but also to improve the morale of not only the Commissioned Corps but the civil servants as well. I explained that I was on my way to other duties and could only be there briefly and I wanted to take the opportunity to review some of the key findings of my most recent report on Smoking and Health. This was the report that I had mentioned for the first time in my remarks at the 100th Anniversary on January 4th. I started off with the bad news in the latest report. In 1985, 390,000 Americans died because of tobacco use. That's one out of every 6 deaths in the United States. Almost all of this carnage was caused by lung cancer which has now caught up with breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer deaths among women.

I related smoking to stroke which is the third leading cause of death in the United States and pointed out that men are 3.7 more than likely, and women are 4.5 more than likely to have a stroke if they are smokers. More bad news had to do with the fact that smoking is still more common among blacks, blue-collar workers, and people with less education. And we must improve our efforts at smoking control with these groups. The rate of smoking among high school seniors which had been dropping year by year is no longer declining as it once was. The average age at which people start smoking continues to

decrease. One quarter of high school seniors who smoke had their first cigarette by the sixth grade.

However, there was good news. The overall prevalence of smoking continues to decrease -- not as rapidly as we'd like. But between 1964 and 1985 over three quarters of a million deaths were avoided or postponed as a result of decisions to quit smoking or not to start. By the year 2000, three million lives will have been extended because of these decisions in those 15 years. Activities are increasing at state and local levels and the numbers of communities with smoking restrictions has more than tripled in the last three years. This is exciting and demonstrates the concern that people now have about passive as well as active smoking.

I then reminded them that we're expecting projects like COMMIT will give us even more good news. And that's what I really came to talk about. I reminded those that were in training that when they got back home to remember they had the support, encouragement, and occasionally, even the envy of all of us in the Public Health Service. They were on the leading edge of the largest smoking control project ever conducted. I admitted it was a challenge. It was a challenge for the National Cancer Institute to create it. Now it's a challenge for those taking the training program to carry it out. It's also a challenge for the communities from whence these trainees came.

I assured them all of my personal support and respect and wished them success. Since their success is success for all of us.